

CONNECTION

Reston ♦ Herndon ♦ Chantilly ♦ CENTREVIEW
Oak Hill

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PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

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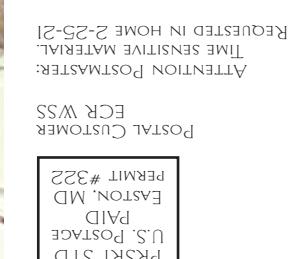
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FEBRUARY 24 - MARCH 2, 2021



ONLINE AT WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

NEWS

'Tireless Devotion to Traffic Safety and the Community'

Whisenhunt is Sully District Station's Officer of the Year.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Police Officer First Class (PFC) Richard "Rick" Whisenhunt has been selected as the Sully District Police Station's 2020 Officer of the Year. He was honored at the Feb. 10 meeting of the station's Citizens Advisory Committee.

Nominating him for this award was 2nd Lt. Brian Calfee. And in his write-up, he explained several reasons why Whisenhunt was deserving of this special accolade.

"PFC Whisenhunt has consistently exhibited an incredible amount of dedication, hard work and passion for police work that deserves recognition as the Sully District Station's 2020 Officer of the Year," wrote Calfee. He then elaborated on the officer's long career devoted to keeping the public safe.

When Whisenhunt graduated from the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy, he already had three decades in law enforcement under his belt. Prior to coming here, he worked for eight years as an undercover agent for the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation. He then served as a unit and section chief with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) for 24-1/2 years.

So when Whisenhunt joined the county Police Department, it was a continuation of his long career in law-enforcement and the start of a new chapter with a different branch. But this time, the emphasis was on community policing.

AFTER GRADUATING from the academy in February 2015, Whisenhunt was assigned to the Sully District Station Midnights B shift and has remained there ever since. In that capacity, wrote Calfee, "He has proven to be a tireless and consistent workhorse, making the community's roadways safer by focusing his efforts on taking impaired drivers off the road."

Stressing how "incredibly dangerous" driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol is for everyone on the road, Calfee noted that, in 2019, Fairfax County had 413 alcohol-related crashes. Seven of them were fatal, and 32 involved serious injuries. The Sully District had 72 alcohol-related crashes, one with a fatality and six with serious injuries.

"In the past four years – to help stop these crashes from happening – Whisenhunt has taken 95 drunk drivers off Sully's roadways," wrote Calfee. "This total includes 13 arrests in 2017, 27 in 2018, 27 in 2019, and 28 in 2020. Currently, he leads the Sully District Station [in drunk-driving arrests] and is the fifth-leading officer in Fairfax County for DWI enforcement."

Besides that, Calfee described Whisenhunt as "a well-rounded officer who also balances his passion for DWI enforcement and education with community policing. He has often assisted his squad members with domestic disputes or runaway juveniles, due to his knowledge and experience with so many community members in the Sully District."

"Throughout his shift, Whisenhunt will be seen initiating traffic stops and providing his full attention in enforcing the traffic code," continued Calfee. "Yet at



PHOTO COURTESY OF LT. JOSH LAITINEN

PFC Richard Whisenhunt is the Sully District Station's 2020 Officer of the Year.

"PFC Whisenhunt has consistently exhibited an incredible amount of dedication, hard work and passion for police work that deserves recognition as the Sully District Station's 2020 Officer of the Year."

— 2nd Lt. Brian Calfee

the same time, he'll also be busy assisting disabled motorists, giving help changing tires and, if needed, providing a ride home."

CALFEE said the value of getting to know so many community members is something Whisenhunt takes to heart. During each opportunity he has to speak with local residents, wrote Calfee, "He takes time to interact with them, provide genuine advice if needed, and get to know them." In his free time, he even enjoys volunteering with a local Boy Scout troop.

"These are but a few examples of PFC Whisenhunt's work that are a benefit to his fellow officers, the Sully District and Fairfax County," added Calfee. "For his tireless devotion to traffic safety and the community, he deserves special recognition, and we proudly honor him with the Sully District Station 2020 Officer of the Year Award."

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VDOT Virginia Department of Transportation

Fox Mill Road and Pinecrest Road Intersection Improvements Fairfax County

Virtual Public Information Meeting

Monday, March 15, 2021, 7-8:30 p.m.
www.virginiadot.org/FoxMillPinecrest

Find out about planned improvements at the intersection of Fox Mill Road (Route 665) and Pinecrest Road. The improvements include installing a new traffic signal and constructing left-turn lanes on northbound and southbound Fox Mill Road.

The meeting will be held as a **virtual/online meeting**. Information for accessing and participating in the virtual meeting is available at www.virginiadot.org/FoxMillPinecrest. The project team will make a short presentation beginning at 7 p.m. and answer questions for about an hour after the presentation.

Review project information and meeting details on the webpage above or during business hours at VDOT's Northern Virginia District Office, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030. Please call ahead at 703-259-2768 or TTY/TDD 711 to make an appointment with appropriate personnel.

Give your comments during the meeting, or by **March 25, 2021** via the comment form on the project website, by mail to Mr. Christopher Barksdale, P.E., Virginia Department of Transportation, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 or by email to meetingcomments@VDOT.virginia.gov. Please reference "Fox Mill Road and Pinecrest Road Intersection Improvements" in the subject line.

VDOT ensures nondiscrimination and equal employment in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need more information or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, contact VDOT Civil Rights at 703-259-1775.

State Project: 0665-029-428, P101, R201, C501
UPC: 118460

In case an alternate date is needed, the meeting will be held Monday, March 22, 2021 at the same time.

PETS CONNECTION



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

"This is Angus (MacTavish). He is a Scottish Terrier who lives on Lake Anne with the Lovaas family, John and Fran. Angus is a friendly, affectionate fellow who loves people and small-to-medium-sized dogs. But he has no time for big dogs, especially Labradoodles! Angus was born in Iowa. We first met him at Dulles Airport. He is a certified Scottie with one deep secret...According to his papers, his father was named George W. Bush." - John and Fran Lovaas of Reston



Nothing But the Best for Family

Pets of Reston and Herndon.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

For us lucky ones, pets are part of our lives. Most pets, regardless if they're furry, feathered, finned, or otherwise, elicit our unconditional love. It doesn't matter the responsibilities and expenses. We are there for them every day, from their cute wide-eyed early weeks of life and for many during their last car ride, our hearts aching.

Unknown to pets, they are the best of human mood-boosters, most of the time. Pets increase our physical levels, even when we growl, crawling out of our warm beds in the predawn darkness and schlumping outside with them or filling their dishes with food and water before making our cups of coffee.

And we take pictures of our pets because their faces are friendly, their lives generally short, and they are our adopted family members, welcomed into our homes and cherished in our hearts.



PHOTO BY ABBY SPRINGMANN

"Lily is a German Shepherd and Corgi mix who's half sweetheart, half crotchety old lady. She's stingy with cuddles but loves giving kisses." - Abby and Matt Springmann of Herndon



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

"My Cleo, looking for trouble and looking for a yoga partner." - Sheila Olem, Town of Herndon Mayor

www.CONNECTIONNewspapers.com



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

"Lucky me; Cleo is helping me with my taxes." - Sheila Olem, Town of Herndon Mayor



Sen. Boysko's 'Literary Kitties'

State Sen. Jennifer Boysko's rescue cat, Jane Eyre, stands ready (well actually, lays) to have the Senator's back (well actually, shoulder) and give input on all manner of important bills. Jane, and a second cat, Elizabeth Bennett, were adopted by Senator Boysko and her family, as what Boysko calls their "literary kitties."



Blu, Molly and Samantha waiting for the pumpkin bread.

On a Brighter Side of Lockout

Cindy Morrow, of Reston, writes:

"My neighbors, George and Margie Dellagiarino, and their dog, Molly, have been in a bubble with myself, and my dogs, Blu and Samantha, since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We take daily walks, did a virtual walk around at Burke Lake Park in support of Briggs Animal Adoption Center and have celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day together. One of the dogs' favorite activities is a weekly car ride/walk in a different area of Reston, followed by a stop at a Starbucks for some doggie treats and at times, a few pieces of pumpkin bread."



Myself with Blu and Sam at Burke Lake Park - Sam has never met a bench that she didn't like.

Celebrating Black History

There are ample reasons to be celebrating Black history in Virginia this month and throughout the year.

BY KENNETH R. "KEN" PLUM
STATE DELEGATE (D-36)

One of the meaningful traditions that has evolved in the Virginia House of Delegates over the last couple of decades has been the celebration of Black History Month by having a speech each day on the House floor about famous Black persons and their struggles and accomplishments in the Commonwealth. According to History magazine, Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history. Also known as African American History Month, the event grew out of "Negro History Week," the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976 the month of February has been designated as Black History Month and is celebrated around the world, including in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Virginia has a unique role in Black histo-



COMMENTARY

ry. The first enslaved Blacks arrived in Virginia in 1619, and the labors of these persons were central to the growth of the Virginia colony and then state. It was Black laborers who built the grand plantations' homes and the institutions of higher education while themselves living in meager housing and refused entrance into public schools and colleges. It was Black slave labor that built the early Virginia tobacco economy while being denied all but the most limited income. Black persons supported the lifestyle of the most prominent Virginia families with no public recognition of their accomplishments. As significant as were Jefferson's words that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence, they did not apply to the slaves in his household nor to the Constitution that counted them as 3/5ths of a person.

The Emancipation Proclamation, the outcome of the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment did not result in equal-

ity under the law for Black citizens. Under the federal Reconstruction government about one hundred Black citizens were elected to public office between 1869 and 1890 including a Black congressman, but a swift reaction by conservative whites led to Jim Crow laws and voting laws that quickly curtailed the power of Black voters. The 1902 Virginia Constitution that included a literacy test and poll tax for voting limited the number of Black voters to such a degree that they did not regain their numbers at the turn of the century until the 1990s.

The recent history of voting in Virginia offers reasons to celebrate. There are more Black members of the Virginia General Assembly today than at any time since Reconstruction. There are two Black congressmen from Virginia. The Lieutenant Governor, the President of the Virginia Senate, and the majority leader of the House of Delegates are Black. The General Assembly has made historic strides in repealing Jim Crow laws, expanding voter participation and reforming criminal justice laws and practices that discriminated against persons of color. Virginia was the first state to have a Black governor, and for the nominations to run this fall there are at least two Black women and one Black man running for governor, two or more Black men running for lieutenant governor and at least one Black man running for the attorney general nomination. There are ample reasons to be celebrating Black history in Virginia this month and throughout the year.

High School Students Receive Peace Awards

Students from 24 Fairfax County public schools have been named recipients of the 2021 Student Peace Awards of Fairfax County, designed to recognize young people who work as peacemakers. Recipients will be recognized at a virtual reception in March.

The Student Peace Awards of Fairfax County were begun in 2006 to encourage people to think more about peace as both a means and an end, and to recognize young people who work as peacemakers. Every year, the high schools in Fairfax County are asked to select one junior or senior, or a group of students, whose work has promoted peace. The project is organized by volunteers and funded by donations from 17 secular and religious sponsoring organizations.

The 2021 recipients include the following students from our area:

Active Minds Club, Centreville High School -- Seniors Gabrielle Martis, Anna McNulty, and Lydia Kim are officers of the Centreville High School chapter, an organization dedicated to mental health awareness and education for young adults. The club has experienced an increase in membership from students in lower grades as well as greater gender diversity. During the pandemic, the club instituted a pen pal system to enable members to build community among themselves and to safely engage with each other.

The Teen Town Hall Project, Chantilly High School -- Nayana Celine Xavier led a group of

seven Chantilly students to establish a virtual town hall to explore the concerns of underrepresented students. The group held a Zoom call in which they fielded questions on race, culture, ethnicity, and gender issues and the program has expanded to cover issues concerning Asian-Americans, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students, as well as the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Aamirah "Molly" Malik, Herndon High School -- As part of a group of students, she gave gifts through Heifer International of a cow and chickens to a family in Africa in honor of their geography teacher. The animals have enabled the family to become self-sustaining entrepreneurs through the sale of milk and eggs. She is a member of When We All Vote, registering people to vote and taking an organizational role.

Shreya Papneja, Langley High School established the nonprofit CHAPS - Children's Health Awareness Program in Schools to help enable school children to make health-conscious decisions. The organization has provided information to students and parents about health and nutrition and provided them with information on local resources and held food drives. During the COVID pandemic, the program raised more than \$5,000 for the charity Real Food for Kids through outreach and a GoFundMe account.

Kunming Chen, Mountain View High School spreads peace through advocacy and kung fu, sharing his deep respect for life and belief in the value of diverse ideas. In addition to

his full-time studies at Mountain View, Chen works as a kung fu instructor and provides his students who are struggling with free tutoring and counseling. On the FCPS district-wide Student Council Association, he provides a voice for ESOL students in an effort to break both language and cultural barriers that impede student success.

Diana Ho, South Lakes High School is a mental health advocate, working to get more services in FCPS. As a member of Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE), she spoke in support of VOICE's budget proposal to Governor Ralph Northam for funding mental health services in schools. She and other students founded the VOICE Teen Team and lobbied the Virginia General Assembly in 2019 about their proposals. Based on her own experiences, Diana offers advice to those new to mental health self-care and self-awareness through her Take Care website.

Westfield Minds Matter, Westfield High School works to change the school culture regarding mental health. Group members have organized open conversations about mental health to increase help-seeking behavior, promote connections, and increase healthy habits and coping skills. They established a teacher and administrator mental health panel in the hope that their concerns will be addressed by adults outside of their meetings. They are also working to ensure students have access to needed resources for mental health.

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SPORTS

PHOTOS BY WILL PALENSCAR/THE CONNECTION



Reece Schirmer and his Centreville teammates celebrate while Centreville Coach Kevin Harris holds up the Class 6 Trophy after his team defeated Potomac 63-49.



Chris Kuzemka #0 led Centreville with 21 points in the Virginia Class 6 State Championship .

Centreville Wildcats Win State Championship

One year after being named co-champions with South County High School, the Centreville Wildcats took the Virginia Class 6 Boys State Championship at Centreville High School on Feb. 20. The Wildcats came in with only two losses during the season, one to Hayfield who they defeated 64-55 in the state semi final game on Feb. 17 and Paul VI on Jan. 8. The Wildcats opponent for the Class 6 championship was previously undefeated Potomac, who advanced to the final by beating Landstown 79-73. After Potomac tied the

game late in the second half, Centreville would pull away in the closing minutes of the game and win 63-49.

Centreville was led by Chris Kuzemka with 21 points in the championship game. Avery Ford added 17 points, Mason Jones 11, Paul McClain 10, and Reece Schirmer added 4 points. Potomac was led by Tyrell Harris with 17 and Kyle Honore with 15.

— WILL PALENSCAR

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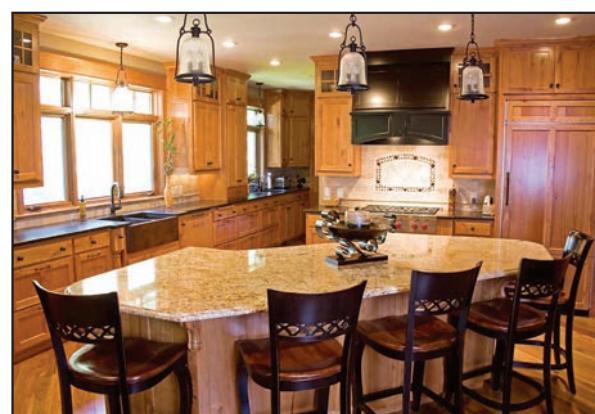


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CALENDAR

FRIDAY/FEB. 26

A Taste of California - Virtual Wine Tasting event with host, Vienna Vintner - 6:30-7:45 p.m. via Zoom. A benefit for Shepherd's Center serving Oakton-Vienna-Reston-Herndon. During the tasting, Vienna Vintner's owner, Victor Mendes, will be presenting a selection of 3 fine wines from his own winery in California's Paso Robles region. He will be showcasing wines from his VIX selection. To participate in this private tasting experience, contact Vienna Vintner by Feb. 25 at 703-242-9463, or viennavintner@gmail.com, or stop by Vienna Vintner, 320 Maple Ave E, Vienna, VA 22180 to register and purchase your wine. Visit www.scov.org/announcements

SATURDAY/FEB. 27

Geocaching Workshop. 2-4 p.m. At Lake Fairfax Park, 1400 Lake Fairfax Drive, Reston. Channel your inner pirate and go on a modern-day treasure hunt using a handheld Global Positioning System, better known as GPS. Discover how you can use GPS units to locate hidden treasure caches within the park. After learning how to enter latitude and longitude coordinates into a GPS, participants will follow the coordinates to find a hidden object, container or unique geological feature. Bring your own GPS; a limited number are available to borrow from the instructor at class. The cost is \$22 per person. Call 703-471-5414.

MARCH 1-29

"Life in Historic Virginia." At Sully Historic Site, 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly. Part of the Park Authority's new series of "Field Trips for All" that are designed to supplement classroom and online lessons. Parks provide an experience not easily duplicated in the classroom, and these field trips offer parents a unique opportunity to provide their kids with real experiences while applying the concepts required in the Virginia Standards of Learning. This history program is designed for students in grades one through six. Life in Historic Virginia is offered on Mondays, March 1, 15, 22 and 29, 2021. The 45-minute programs at Sully Historic Site run at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., and the cost is \$40 per family. Call 703-437-1794.

MARCH 6-7

Franchise Show Chantilly. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. At the Dulles Expo Center, 4320 Chantilly Shopping Center, Chantilly. The community is invited to The Franchise Show at the Dulles Expo Center from March 6 – 7, 2021. Full-time and part-time business opportunities from every industry, at every investment level. Visit the website: <http://thebizex.net/dcvirginia-franchise-show-march-6-2021/>

SATURDAY/MARCH 20

Maple Syrup Boil Down. 11 a.m., noon, and 1 p.m. At Colvin Run Mill, 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls. It's sugaring time at the mill, so bundle up, brave the weather and watch and learn as sap is boiled down into a sweet syrup over an open fire. While supplies last, sample some of this delicious syrup over cornbread baked with cornmeal ground at Colvin Run. Call 703-759-2771.

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-Werner Heisenberg

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Trust and Transparency Enhance Public Safety

Supervisor Alcorn hosts Hunter Mill Town Hall With FCPD.

By MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Leadership at the Fairfax County Police Department, Reston District Station are “very proud” of their work but acknowledge there is more work to come. “We want to ensure we are completely transparent and ensure the community’s trust,” said Station Commander Thea Purnat during the Virtual Town Hall hosted by Hunter Mill District Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D) on Tuesday, Feb. 16. The hour-long event featured Alcorn’s introduction focused on proposed County policing options, followed by Purnat’s review of trends and statistics and Assistant Commander Lieutenant Marc Mitchell’s overview of officer training. It ended with a question-and-answer period. Alcorn said that there had been much in the news about policing over the past year, and a number of issues related to policing had come to the Board of Supervisors for consideration. Alcorn described his Joint Board Matter: Request to Review the 9-1-1 Dispatch and Response System to Enhance Division First Strategies that he and Lee District Supervisor Rodney Lusk (D) introduced. Alcorn shared that some calls to 9-1-1 did not necessarily involve criminal activity but were instances of mental and behavioral health crises.

Alcorn said, “Should we be sending... folks who are experienced to deal with these types of mental health or behavioral crisis or perhaps be able to approach them in a little bit different way other than Fire and Rescue or our uniformed police.”

PIRNAT described Reston District Station’s 56 square mile coverage, an area consisting of Reston and parts of Great Falls, Vienna, Oak Hill, and Herndon. The District contained varied elements, Reston Town Center, Lake Fairfax Park, Great Falls National Park, Frying Pan Park, Riverbend County Park, and Metro Stations. The area also exhibited vertical population growth, and thus the Station needed to have a healthy, collaborative working relationship with surrounding jurisdictions and other law enforcement agencies. Purnat added the Station expected it would be experiencing changes in its types of calls and police responsibilities.

“Fairfax County is one of the safest communities in the entire nation to live,” said Purnat. “Our crime rate is three times below the national average... (and) we have one of the lowest ratios of police officers to the general population.”

According to Purnat, there had been a downturn for most crimes in the County. There was a decrease in criminal nature calls; traffic enforcement went down overall, and specific to the Reston District Station, there was a decrease in DWI fatalities in 2020.

Purnat noted a drop in the number of robberies and burglaries. Robberies decreased from a reported 344 in 2019 to 314 in 2020.

While there were decreases, a number of increases occurred. According to Purnat, in 2019, the County cited 455 weapon law violation calls compared to the upsurge of 518 in 2020. Motor vehicle thefts jumped from 863 in 2019 to 1,273 in 2020. “I believe that is related to the pandemic,” Purnat said. Mental health calls ticked upwards slightly in 2020, to a total of 5000 calls compared to the previous year’s count at 4,715.

“I do think some of those extra calls for service were related to the fact that individuals weren’t able to get their normal service provider, contact that they had prior years, due to the pandemic (and) due to telehealth being implemented,” Purnat said.

Overall, Purnat considered that Reston maintained a “very safe atmosphere,” even though she acknowledged a September 2020 homicide remained an active case. It involved the Sept. 17 shooting of 19-year-old Iris Ponce Garcia that took place in the area of Colts Neck Road and Glade Drive. In another Reston homicide, the Feb. 10, 2021, deadly shooting of Samuel Onyeuka in the 2300 block of Branleigh Park Court, police arrested a man within days.

Purnat said they had been getting “a lot of calls in particular that are causing concerns for sounds of what are gunshots and that causes obviously a great deal of tension.”

IN RESPONSE to a recent community meeting, Purnat said the Station launched (on Jan. 4) its RESET initiative, the Reston Engagement and Safety Enforcement Team. Purnat described it as a blended team composed of officers from patrol and bike, a detective and a community engagement officer to communicate with community members, building rapport and trust while increasing visibility and suppressing crime.

Purnat recognized that police work is a changing profession. “We will continue to evolve. There’s always room for growth and improvement. Fairfax County prides itself on being a role model on how to do it right... Our goal has always been to use voluntary compliance and not use force.” Purnat said chokeholds had not been used for 20 years and are prohibited. Their pursuit policy had been revisited.

Assistant Commander Lt. Mitchell provided an overview on the process to become a Fairfax County police officer, a position he described leading to “public trust” for individuals whose backgrounds are honorable, law-abiding and ethical. The Academy is a 6-month training period where individuals are taken from recruits to sworn police officers. They then serve in a probationary capacity under the direction of an FTI (Field Training Instructor), where the newly learned skills are given real-life experience in the community. Once they pass that, they become a senior officer.

The hour-long meeting is recorded and posted on Alcorn’s YouTube channel for public viewing.

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Not That I Don't Understand But ...



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

... So this is what the process is like trying to schedule a covid-19 vaccination. If you’re lucky though, you receive an email reminder - since you’ve pre-registered, advising you that the time to strike is now. You click on the link, and as I’m witnessing, you wait your turn. The site says there’s “High Traffic,” and they’ll be with you momentarily. There’s no calling. There’s barely any responding. There’s simply sitting and staring - and waiting. There’s no indication of how long you’ll be waiting. There’s no guarantee that the site will even open. There’s only instructions to refresh your computer every 30 seconds in the hopes that an interactive-type page will appear and you’ll have reached the promised land: the page where you can actually schedule an appointment.

However, as I’m sitting and waiting, I’m getting frustrated. I seem to be getting nowhere, slowly. Though I’m refreshing as directed, nothing is changing on the screen I’m staring at. I’ve linked but nothing is really linking. So I keep repeating myself: stare, refresh, wait; stare, refresh, wait. It’s a loop of nothingness. It seems an endless pursuit. It’s almost like whack-a-mole, except in your attempts to get connected, the process is excruciatingly slow and there’s nothing to whack. (At least it hasn’t cost me anything, other than time, that is.)

I realize that the demand is way more than supply and according to experts, it won’t be until June/July when “anyone who wants to get a shot will be able to get one.” Nevertheless, I would have thought, given my comorbidity: cancer and age 66, that I’d be closer to the top than the bottom. Not that I’m particularly anxious about my circumstances, but my wife Dina is very concerned about them. (I’m staring steady at the site where this column began. As yet, despite my rigorous refreshing, I still haven’t passed “Go.”)

I understand that patience is a virtue. But today, while staring at and refreshing this site and seeing no sign of life as we know it, I am testing that virtue beyond its stress points. This process reminds of the days of buying concert tickets online. It was nearly impossible - for a popular show, to break through the internet logjam. That is not until you received a message that all the tickets had been sold. How people ever got through, I’ll never know. It was always befuddling to me.

I know however, with respect to concerts, sporting events and the like, there would be a secondary/aftermarket availability. I knew an alternative existed. I also knew the cost would be black market-ish, somewhat over the original retail. Unfortunately, or fortunately, public health solutions cannot be left to the market. In its effort not to discriminate and be fair to all recipients, we’re stuck with the present communication and distribution system.

Having endured these kinds of pursuits before when calling the IRS, Social Security, Medicare and The Veterans Administration, et cetera, I know a few precautions one should take before attempting to climb these mountains. First, clear your schedule. Next, go to the bathroom. Then, go to the kitchen and get some refreshments. Find someplace comfortable and cozy from which to call; you need to be prepared for the long haul. And finally, should another call come in while you’re on hold, do not risk your spot in line by clicking on your call-waiting. Technology can sometimes break your spirit.

My wait is over. The site was just refreshed. It says the center is closed. Perfect timing. I just finished the column.

Herndon Mayor Asks for Integrity and Respect

Councilmembers' purported harsh rhetoric impacts morale and governing.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Jolted by an escalating trend of interruptions and statements by Town of Herndon Councilmembers, most recently at Council Discussion of Strategic Initiatives on February 9, Mayor Sheila Olem intervened. At the start of the Feb. 16 Work Session, Olem rephrased Town Ordinance. She requested all councilmembers observe meeting decorum and refrain "from threatening, intimidating, language attacks concerning the character and motives of other members of the council, town staff or the public."

The meeting progressed according to the agenda reaching the final portion reserved for the Roundtable. This is where councilmembers voice comments on matters of importance to them. Vice Mayor Olem opened the floor first to Vice Mayor Cesar del Aguila. "I'll defer to my councilmembers," the vice mayor said. Councilmembers Naila Alam, Sean Regan, and Jasbinder Singh



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

(From top left) Herndon Vice Mayor Cesar del Aguila, Councilmember Jasbinder Singh, Town Attorney Lesa Yeatts, Councilmember Naila Alam, (From bottom left) Councilmember Pradip Dhakal, Councilmember Sean Regan, Mayor Sheila Olem, and Councilmember Signe Friedrichs.

declined to comment. Councilmember Pradip Dhakal said they had received many comments about the Town Council Discussion of Strategic Initiatives held on Feb. 9. Saying he wanted to clear the confusion from his perspective, Dhakal said, "We're just talking about the what and why...What is feasible to implement, what is not feasible to implement. (It) doesn't mean we've approved anything yet."

COUNCILMEMBER Signe Frie-

drichs also commented. She addressed councilmember behavior and rhetoric head-on. Friedrichs said it came to her attention that staff had "very poor morale right now," following recent staff meetings where some councilmembers said things about Town employees that they shouldn't have.

"They were very hurtful things," Friedrichs said. "Some staff, some managers in the Town, have advised their staff not to watch our meetings because they are so bad

for staff morale...I do not want to be on a Council that doesn't care for the morale of its staff and that doesn't treat them professionally, kindly and openly."

According to Friedrichs, the staff is constrained in ways councilmembers are not. It is not an equal power relationship. Friedrichs said, "Our staff is unable to contradict us in public. That's their policy." She advised fellow councilmembers not to stand in front of the public and tell things that worry them. Instead,

talk to the Town Manager. "Reckless and conspiratorial statements about our staff make them feel helpless and hopeless... They undermine our Town as a whole."

Friedrichs stressed that the Town had educated staff, from its talented Manager to amazing Attorney to the Police Chief known nationwide for her progressive approach and dedication to equitable policing. "It is really important that we treat our staff in a way that we would want to be treated and that we're kind to them because they have no protection against us," she said.

THE DAY AFTER the meeting, Vice Mayor del Aguila said, "What Councilmember Friedrichs said is fine, but I would rather focus on taking care of the Town, the shared responsibility that we've been granted and focused on long-term initiatives... Fact is, where's there's chaos, there's a concern....In all this other stuff, I just wish people would stay away from the personal. I don't think we have time for that, and I don't think the voters want us to go there."

Construction Begins Soon on Route 28 Widening

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County's Department of Transportation will soon begin construction to widen Route 28 in Centreville. This heavily traveled road will be increased from four to six lanes between the bridge over Bull Run (south of Compton Road) and the Route 29 Interchange.

Work is currently slated to start around March 1. The first stage of construction will include paving and strengthening portions of the existing shoulders along the entire length of the project. This work will be done as follows:

* In the southern portion of the project, between the bridge over Bull Run and the intersection of Route 28 and Old Mill Road/Green Trails Boulevard, construction will be completed along the outside (right) shoulder going southbound, and along the outside (right) shoulder going northbound.

In future construction stages, traffic will be shifted onto the newly paved shoulders to enable the widening to be accomplished

with minimal impact to traffic flow during peak travel periods. Beginning this week, the contractor will install construction signs and message boards in advance of construction activities.

Drivers should expect delays and be on the lookout for temporary lane closures during off-peak hours for both the advance, construction-sign installation and shoulder-paving and strengthening work.

Temporary lane closures on Route 28 will be restricted from 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 9:30 a.m.-2 p.m., on Fridays. No lane closures will be allowed during peak travel periods and holidays.

Weekend and nighttime work activities aren't currently planned during this stage of the project but are anticipated for future stages. All work is weather-dependent and will be rescheduled if inclement conditions occur.

Besides widening Route 28, the fully funded \$88.35 million project will also yield additional lanes on the side streets to ease traffic flow. It will improve intersection operations, as well, by upgrading existing traffic signals and improving bicycle and pedestrian crossings. Furthermore, new, 10-foot-wide, shared-use paths will be created on both sides of Route 28. the median (left) shoulder, heading north.

BULLETIN BOARD

YOUNG AT ART EXHIBIT AT RCC

The annual Young at Art exhibit for artists 55+ will take place at RCC Hunters Woods during April. This free exhibit, for two-dimensional art only, will go from Thursday, April 1 to Friday, April 30. Because they are still in COVID mode, the reception, informal judging of art and award certificates will not happen this year.

One piece of art in any medium that can hang on a wall and follows RCC Hunters Woods guidelines will be accepted on a first-come-first served basis.

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event.

Go to the website to download a form. (Website: <https://www.restoncommunitycenter.com/attend-shows-events-exhibits/exhibits-and-galleries/calls-for-entries>).

Or go to www.restoncommunitycenter.com, click on Exhibits and Galleries under Attend Shows, Events and Exhibits. Look on the left side for Calls for Entries and go to the bottom of the page.

The Call for Entries deadline (form only) is Sunday, March 14. You may mail it or drop it off at either RCC Lake Anne or RCC Hunters Woods. Drop off of art will occur on Thursday, April 1 between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. in the Community

Room at RCC Hunters Woods.

SMITH HOSTS MARDI GRAS HAPPY HOUR

Sully District Supervisor Kathy Smith is hosting a Mardi Gras "Happy Hour" via Zoom on Saturday, March 6 at 5 p.m. Gather around with some of your closest friends and neighbors from the Sully District as they are joined by Congressman Gerry Connolly (VA-11) to discuss the future of Virginia's "Blue Wave". What's more, Smith is offering a special "Mardi Gras Box" to everyone who signs up for the party! The box contains every-

thing you need to enjoy the special happy hour. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased here: <https://kathysmith.ngpvanhost.com/form/8558095534664321024>

CONSTRUCTION TO BEGIN ON ROUTE 28 WIDENING

The Fairfax County Department of Transportation will begin construction to widen Route 28 from four to six lanes between the bridge over Bull Run (south of Compton Road) and the interchange at Route 29 in Centreville on or about March 1, 2021.

The first stage of construction will include paving and strengthening

portions of the existing shoulders along the entire length of the project, specifically:

In the southern portion of the project, between the bridge over Bull Run and the intersection of Route 28 and Old Mill Road/Green Trails Boulevard, work will be completed along the outside (right) shoulder in the southbound direction and along the median (left) shoulder in the northbound direction.

In the northern portion of the project, between the intersection of Route 28 and Old Mill Road/Green Trails Boulevard and the interchange at Route 29, work will be completed on the outside (right) in both the southbound and northbound directions.